



**TESTIMONY OF THE CONNECTICUT JUVENILE JUSTICE ALLIANCE  
FOR THE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE  
BUDGET HEARINGS  
DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES  
FEBRUARY 14, 2014**

Good afternoon, Representative Walker, Senator Bye, members of the committee. Thank you for the opportunity to speak about the DCF budget. I'm Abby Anderson, executive director of the Connecticut Juvenile Justice Alliance, a statewide advocacy organization dedicated to stopping the criminalization of Connecticut's children. We support evidence-based prevention to keep children from entering the system as well as services to help kids who do enter the system to be successful.

People like me always testify that the state is not spending enough on the kids we advocate for. And we're always right. Today I come to you with a special urgency. Our juvenile justice system is fairer, more effective and even cheaper to operate than it was a decade ago. We are in serious danger, though, of reversing those gains.

I want to talk with you about:

- The need to support a full array of services and programs that meet the needs of a changing population in the juvenile justice system instead of pouring new money into new locked facilities.
- The need to reinvest money we save by avoiding incarceration and other congregate care stays to fund preventive and rehabilitative services that will bring the census in locked facilities, currently trending alarmingly high, back down to levels seen in recent years.
- And the need to fund capacity building at DCF so that it can analyze and use data to provide Connecticut's children the level of service and protection they deserve.

Connecticut has won national praise for removing kids from the system who never should have been there – such as runaways, truants and those whose missteps were relatively minor. We've extended the services and safety of juvenile jurisdiction to 16- and 17-year-olds, again, winning national praise.

Are we now going to put the necessary programming in place to make sure that young people get the maximum benefit from these reforms? Or are we going to go back to the bad old days of locking kids up because we lack adequate services?

The system has been right-sized. Its population – appropriately – is older and has more complex needs. But, we must change our services to match the needs of this new demographic. For example, older youth are more apt to need independent living support, substance abuse treatment, vocational readiness training and so on. They frequently cannot access these services. Younger kids also face service barriers or unavailability.

This budget reduces DCF's funding by \$11.7 million from the biennial budget the legislature passed. This reduction won't allow the department to develop a full continuum of services responsive to the young people in its care.

The money DCF saves through reducing its reliance on incarceration must be reinvested in services that will help children be successful and keep our incarceration rate low. This reinvestment has not occurred on a sufficient scale.

Ironically, this budget actually does the opposite by giving DCF \$2.6 million to open a second maximum-security girls facility. Commissioner Katz has described its potential residents as girls who “have suffered years of abuse and neglect.” She added, “I am hoping to provide opportunities for these girls.”

A locked facility is the worst setting to provide opportunities for traumatized girls. The commissioner acknowledged that many children are under DCF’s care when they become trafficked and talked about the need to serve children better to prevent exploitation. This budget does not adequately support prevention or an improvement of existing programming for girls – or boys.

This is part of a trend toward secure confinement, the most expensive intervention there is, and often the least effective.

Admissions to the Connecticut Juvenile Training School are rising. In 2010, the year 16-year-olds moved to juvenile jurisdiction, 211 boys were admitted to CJTS. That number dropped to 174 in 2011, but rose to 201 in 2012. 17-year-olds entered the juvenile system in July 2012. In 2013, the number of CJTS admissions climbed to 252. Since the census dropped when 16-year-olds were added, we can’t blame the addition of 17-year-olds alone for the spike.

CJTS is filling up as group homes and other residential facilities are closing. Those closings can be seen as a positive – with fewer kids entering the system, we need fewer beds. But in the absence of good community-based programming, the only choice may be to send a child home with no support or to a locked facility. CJTS is used for short-term stays for reasons like medication adjustment. No child should be locked in a cell to get medical care.

While the need to bolster services is urgent, the state must also fund information technology upgrades at DCF. The department does not track recidivism. Recidivism rates tell us if programs are working, services are effective – in RBA language, “is anyone better off?” DCF can’t answer that question. It needs the computer infrastructure, statutory authority and expertise to collect and use data well. Without it everything we do is based on a “gut feeling.” That is unacceptable.

The child welfare system feeds the juvenile justice system. The recent report of the Federal Court Monitor warns of caseloads that keep DCF social workers from meeting their clients’ needs. In 2012, 450 youth were arrested out of DCF facilities. Most were not in DCF care for juvenile justice issues. When DCF can’t meet the needs of their clients, those clients are apt to get arrested.

Support for children’s mental health and permanency is inadequate. Though children’s mental health got a great deal of lip service last session, the budget appropriates more new dollars for a new maximum security facility for girls than it does for community-based children’s mental health care.

DCF doesn't have the tools it needs to fulfill its juvenile justice mandate. So even DCF's successes are in danger, and that means children are in danger. I urge you to give DCF adequate funding for programs that are data-driven and support children and families.

Thank you for your time and attention. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

**Alliance member organizations:**

AFCAMP, Center for Children's Advocacy, Center for Effective Practice, CHDI, Connecticut Legal Services, Connecticut Voices for Children, Connecticut Youth Services Association, Community Partners in Action, FAVOR, FSW, NAMI Connecticut and the Keep the Promise Coalition, Office of the Chief Public Defender, Office of the Child Advocate, RYASAP, The Tow Foundation, The Village for Families and Children